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EUN

SUBJECT: IRAN: EU SEEKS TO BOLSTER PUBLIC DIPLOMACY
EFFORTS, SEEKS INFORMATION EXCHANGE WITH USG

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Classified By: USEU Polmincouns Chris Davis for reasons 1.4(b) and(d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Recent conversations with European Commission, Council, and Member State representatives indicate that while the will exists to expand their current Iran-related public diplomacy programming, a number of factors are slowing the EU's ability to implement such programs. The absence of a Commission presence in Tehran is only one of several causes: feuding between the Commission and Council over division of authority and resources, lack of a broad contact base in-country, lack of Member State coordination on bilateral projects, and fear of Iranian government reprisals also contribute to EU hesitancy. Both Commission and Council contacts expressed keen interest in increasing information sharing with the USG on best practices in Farsi-language internet public diplomacy, broadcasting, and exchange programs. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) CURRENT EFFORTS FOCUS ON EDUCATION, EXPANDING TO INCLUDE LIMITED BROADCASTING: DG RELEX Iran Deputy Director Francois Massoulie and Deputy Head of Unit Information and Communications Oliver Nette reviewed both current and upcoming EC-sponsored projects with Mission officers and visiting Berlin Iran Watcher. Current programs include the allotment of 60 ERASMUS scholarship slots for Iranian university students as well as Commission sponsorship of a Human Rights Department at Qom's Mofid University. Two larger-scale projects, aiming to educate Iranians about the EU system and European values, are also in the works. The Commission is currently soliciting bids for a five-year, 15 million Euro Farsi-language television program, financed by the European Parliament and featuring European-oriented news.

¶3. (C) Both Commission and Council representatives expressed strong interest in expanding public diplomacy programming, but cited multiple reasons for their hesitance so far. Council Iran Desk officer Didier Cosse and SG/HR Solana's Deputy Personal Representative for Nonproliferation Andreas Strub said that they favor additional public diplomacy steps to engage the Iranian people to complement its tough line on the regime's nuclear program.

¶4. (C) INFIGHTING, NO COMMISSION PRESENCE, LIMITED CONTACT BASE HINDER EFFORTS: Numerous roadblocks, however, are blocking EU progress on expanding their public diplomacy efforts. The Council and the Commission continue to wrangle over a public diplomacy package for Iran. The dispute

centers on two aspects of the draft Council Joint Action. The first concerns whether the Commission and Council mandates and resources will be determined on the basis of second or first pillar (CFSP vs. community) action. Second, member states differ on whether the text of the Joint Action, which is a public document, should be a general overview of intention or a detailed explanation of actions, intentions, and funding. According to a Council contact, the UK is in favor of a "less is more" approach, whereas the Dutch, Swedes, Austrians want greater transparency. The Germans appear undecided. In order to address the various stakeholders' concerns, the French Presidency is now drafting for eventual Council approval an internal "master" policy planning document on Iran PD including details of implementation at the CFSP, bilateral, and Community levels including actions and funding. With such a comprehensive planning reference in hand -- but not for public dissemination -- the French would then seek to have the Council agree to a streamlined Joint Action plan covering only CFSP elements of Iran PD programming. The key elements of the comprehensive plan would likely include broadcasting in Farsi, a seminar in Tehran on EU CFSP, and more exchanges with Iranian journalists and other important constituencies in Iran.

¶5. (C) Another major factor is the Commission's lack of a diplomatic presence in Tehran. Its most recent attempt to place a Commission representative at the Belgian Embassy in Tehran was rejected by the Iranian government, which would prefer a full-scale Commission office and the signal of strengthened relations that would go with it. EU institutional and member state contacts also cited limited contacts among a broad base of Iranian society, noting that the 24 EU member state embassies on the ground tend to interact with a small swath of Iran's political and economic

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elite, resulting in embassies' dependency on this elite to carry out projects at any cost and to a narrow audience.

¶6. (C) A proposed non-official seminar on the CFSP provides a case study of the consequences of limited access: originally tabled during the German EU Presidency, the French picked up the idea in the last few weeks, securing co-sponsorship from the Ravand Institute and the European Institute for Security Studies. According to EU institutional contacts, the Ravand Institute was chosen because it is among the few Iranian think-tanks with the necessary high-level political level connections that was not tainted by the infamous 2006 Holocaust denial conference sponsored by the regime. Commission and French Presidency sources lament that Ravand has tried to take advantage of what they characterize as its virtual "monopoly" power to extract unreasonable financial terms for the seminar slated to take place in early December. Several EU member state contacts told USEU that they balked at a budget estimate presented by the French Presidency on behalf of Ravand that was nearly ten times the normal budget for a conference of this kind. The Czechs believe the seminar may be postponed until their Presidency, but support it as a means to inform Iranian elites about the basic policy functions of the EU. The Czechs would hope to keep the nuclear weapons issue off the agenda, but may wish to address it indirectly under an agenda item on "EU energy policy" (NFI). The Czechs believe it may be possible in the future to gain limited access to Iranian media outlets as well to achieve PD goals, by linking up with Iranian elites who have some common cause on a particular issue, similar to what UN agencies have done through programs.

¶7. (C) Fear of retaliation against Iranian participants and other EU interest is also on the minds of EU Iran policy makers Massoulie cited the example of a planned EU Visitor's Program for journalists to visit Europe, noting that the Commission remains hesitant on implementing the program, due to fears of what the Iranian MOIS would do to the

participants before or after the program. In a similar vein, Strub and Cosse expressed concerns that reaching and convincing Iranian moderates of Western policies in the current Iranian domestic climate has become difficult, making public diplomacy tactical planning all the more difficult: "is this the right moment (for additional PD activities)?" Strub and Cosse also noted their fear of ramifications for other projects and on-the-ground activities; Cosse noted the Iranian Mission to the EU had complained about the European Parliament's support for a new broadcasting channel and posited "what would happen if we gave even more funding?"

¶18. (C) EU Member States have made similar comments in separate discussions. On October 3, a Czech diplomat currently posted to Tehran told Poloff that cultural and ethnic repression in Iran made it increasingly difficult to sponsor cultural events there. Educational exchanges were a more promising avenue for reaching civil society because it was more difficult for the regime to refuse such programming.

The Czech contact praised UN agencies in Tehran for their skill in "selling" programs to the regime, e.g., anti-narcotics, TIP, and refugees, with a price tag that includes some human rights component, such as educational reform and enrollment of girls in school. Asked about other sectors ripe for bilateral cooperation, our Tehran-based Czech contact pointed to archeological preservation, urban renewal, and waste recycling. Finally, a visiting Czech MFA official in charge of human rights programming noted that NGOs in the Czech Republic or elsewhere in the newer EU member states could be potential partners for the USG on Iran democracy programming partners.

¶19. (C) INTEREST IN INCREASED INFORMATION EXCHANGE ON IRAN-RELATED PD EFFORTS: Both Commission RELEX and Council interlocutors expressed appreciation for information presented on USG Iran public diplomacy effort and expressed interest in a more detailed information exchange about best practices on visitor's programs, IIP Farsi language programming, as well as how USG institutions, specifically the BBG and IIP, collect and evaluate user numbers for internet and broadcasting efforts. The Commission asked for information about the exact methodology for media monitoring, which they noted is very expensive, and whether we undertake this regularly. They also expressed interest in exchanging

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views with BBG officials on broadcasting efforts in general.

¶10. (C) RECOMMENDATION AND ACTION REQUEST: Cohesive information sharing among the Member States and with the Commission, let alone strategic and tactical public diplomacy planning, appears to be lacking. We will reach out to provide information on our programs and best practices. We will also explore the idea of a Washington visit by EU and EC Iran-related PD officials and would welcome a Brussels stop by Department officers engaged in Iran PD efforts. We would further recommend that the Department expand the PD aspects of the twice yearly Presidency Trilateral consultations (EU-US-Canada) in order to give the issue more prominence and EU and US efforts more effectiveness. There may be potential for the Czech Republic, given its history and continued active NGOs, to lend focus to Iran civil society support during its Presidency. We would be interested in Embassy Prague and Department views on this.
END COMMENT.

¶11. (C) This is a joint USEU - Embassy Berlin cable.

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